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ABSTRACT

To determine the relationship between oral and written language conventions at the macro and micro levels, a study analyzed various elements of stories generated by children. Subjects, nine above average readers between grades 4 and 9, were asked to tell a story and then to write a story. Sources of stories, overall plot organization, and number and kind of characters represent the macrostructures analyzed. Microstructures analyzed were story conventions, clausal connections, T-units, and type-token ratios. Results indicated that subjects' language mode sensitivity was reflected at the morphological level in the microstructures of their written stories. Observations of children's language usage suggested that a distinction between oral and written vocabularies may be superfluous and that the distinction lies, instead, between receptive and expressive language. Analysis showed that children differentiate between oral and written texts when using fillers. Results indicated that students seldom use the same macrostructures for both their oral and their written stories, suggesting that they develop a repertoire of macro story elements from which they select when generating stories. Results were consistent with M. Ice's longitudinal study. (Statistical tables and a breakdown of each story element are appended.) (JD)

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CHILDREN'S ORAL AND WRITTEN STORIES:

POSSIBILITIES, PROBABILITIES, AND PREFERABILITIES

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Paper presented at the 76th Annual Meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English, San Antonio, TX, November 21-26, 1986

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Children's Oral and Written Stories: Possibilities, Probabilities, and Preferabilities

A commonly accepted notion is that language, whether through listening, talking, reading, or writing, is the means by which most learning in school is channelled. Potentially language can be both an asset or a liability in the learning process depending on the individual. As a result of the emphasis on literacy and literacy learning, a new interest in the relationships between oral and written language has emerged.

In addition to Malinowski's (1923/1935) original concept of context dependence that differentiated spoken and written texts, researchers have focused on sentence and syntactic complexity to document the relationships in children's writings (Strickland, 1962; Hunt, 1965; O'Donnell, 1974; Loban, 1976).

Generally written discourse has been characterized as more complex, integrated and detached, or explicit (Syder & Pawley, 1976; Chafe, 1981; Hildyard & Olson, 1978). Investigators typically attribute high levels of complexity, integration and detachment, or

explicitness in written discourse to the greater frequencies of subordinate clauses, relative clauses, participial phrases, appositive phrases, and passive verb constructions tht exist in writing (Chafe, 1981; Hildyard & Olson, 1978; Kroll, 1977; Loban, 1976; Syder & Pawley, 1976).

Oral discourse, on the other hand, has been characterized as more coordinated, involved, or implicit (Chafe, 1981; Hildyard & Olson, 1978: Kay, 1977). Investigators attribute high levels of coordination, involvement or implicitness to the greater frequencies of coordinated conjunctions and active verb constructions that exist in this mode (Chafe; 1981; Kroll, 1977; Loban, 1976; Syder & Pawley, 1976).

While these investigators cited differences between oral and writen language, Cambourne (1981) cited characteristics which are similar for both written and oral language in that both obviously employ the same basic rules of grammar and vocabulary; both obviously are concerned with communication; both are used in a wide variety of everyday activities; and both are taken for granted by those who use them.

Futhermore, researchers differ in their beliefs about reasons for language mode sensitivity. King and Rentel (1979) proposed that written language is much more than talk written down, for it is expected to convey meaning on its own without the supportive context of the author or the situation and events that generated the message. Smith (1977) questioned whether written language skills are unique even though some different skills are needed. He observed that certain modes of spoken language are just as abstract and as related to context as those of written and oral language. Hence, a child must learn conventions for both written and oral language. Halliday (1980) believed that oral language is syntactically complex, but conceptually not very dense; whereas written language is conceptually dense and syntactically elegant. Perera (1984) proposed that writing requires one individual to produce a sustained and well organized piece of language, whereas most functional oral language is not well organized.

Some investigators have indicated that children's writings are marked by many holdovers

from speech (Graves, 1982; Collins & Michels, 1980; Meier & Cazden, 1982). They have suggested that children have a system of order that is imposed on writing during a transition from speech to print. Recently, some educators have cautioned about the over emphasis of writing as an aspect of thinking and the dangers in giving writing too central of a role in teaching wherein teachers are urged to emphasize writing in all school subjects. Overemphasizing writing might impede the development of nonverbal abilities (Sternberg, 1983; Glatthorn, 1985).

Difficulties arise in summarizing oral and written language differences and similarities as studies generally have not been held constant for discourse type, function, and modality. A growing emphasis on text organization and text processing as important variables in instructional formats has evidenced a surge of interest in children's generation of stories. As educators in educational settings generally assist students with story generation as a totality, story information is needed at macro and micro levels

across modalities to more adequately guide students in the educational process.

This preliminary study was undertaken to determine whether the linguistic and narrative knowledge and usage in children's written narratives that occur at the macro and micro level are similar to those observed by Ice (1986) in children's oral narratives. In her study of macro and micro story elements, the students were adding more elements to their stories rather than replacing old elements with new ones. Moreover, macrostructures were malleable, whereas microstructures were stable. That is, the children's preferences for story story source, characters, and plots reflected relationships between contraints that exist in each setting and language users as well as students' ability to work with and around such constraints. These preferences also reflected learned social and/or educational constraints as well as students' cognitive problem solving abilities to handle multiple demands and causality.

A further rationale for this study was to determine whether the changes in story macro and

micro structures observed in the longitudinal study were an artifact of the research design. The original study as well as this study analyzed children's generation of stories according to the story elements (1) sources of their stories, (2) story characters, (3) story plot, (4) story conventions, (5) connectors between clauses, and (6) minimal terminal units (Hunt, 1965). Each story element is defined and illustrated specifically in Appendix A. An additional story element type-token ratio, the number of times a particular linguistic item occurs in a text in relation to the linguistic clas to which it belongs, was addressed in this study. For both studies story macrostructures referred to the sources of stories, the overall plot organization, and the number and kinds of characters. Story microstructures referred to the use of story conventions, clausal connections, T-units, and type-token ratios.

Method

Subjects

The nine students who participated in this study attend schools in three separate school

districts in Illinois, Missouri, and Colorado. All students rated above average in reading achievement and performance throughout their formal education. Two students were fourth graders, four students were fifth graders, two students were seventh graders, and one student was a ninth grader. All students volunteered to participate in the study.

Procedures

At one setting the students were first asked to "Tell me a story" which was audio tape recorded as well as written down by the researcher. After completion of this task, the students were requested then to "Write me a story" in the presence of the researcher. Both stories were subsequently transcribed and analyzed according to the seven story elements. No time limit was imposed nor were prompts and/or probes of any type provided.

Analysis of the elements consisted of examining each of the story elements according to number and kind in order to determine the similarities and differences between the oral and

written language conventions in the student generated stories. Frequency counts were prepared for each of the story elements and then grouped into frequency distributions for summarization. Finally, frequency percentages were provided to accommodate for story length.

Results

Sources of stories. For both language modes students generated stories from all the sources--actual experiences, versions of a known story, created stories, or a combination of sources for a single text (see Table 1).

Character type. More characters were found in their oral stories than in their written stories. Students tended to use primarily people as characters for both language modes (see Table 2).

Story plot. Stories were generated for each kind of story plot. Embedded plots were the least common plot (see Table 3).

Story conventions. In this study the children's use of story openings appeared to be similar for both their oral and written stories, whereas their use of endings varied slightly.

Terminating the story appeared to be the most common approach for ending stories for both language modes. No fairy tale endings were found in their written stories. Story tense indicated slight differences. No mixed tenses were found in their written stories; no present/future tenses were found in their oral stories (see Table 4).

Clausal connectors. Of the clausal connectors, and as a filler, and then, and and so were found only in their oral stories. Except for a greater frequency of and between sentences in their oral stories, the percentages were relatively comparable for the remaining connectors (see Table 5).

T-units. Their written stories contained more simple sentences even though these stories were shorter in length. Consequently, a fewer number of subordinated sentences were found in their written stories (see Table 6).

Type-token ratios. The ratios for type-tokens were greater for their written stories than for their oral stories as the students generally used a wider variety of words in their written stories (see Table 7).

Discussion

This preliminary study of language mode sensitivity of effective readers' oral and written stories should be regarded as tentative in view of the limitations. Regardless of the limitations, the importance of this study lies in the observation that language mode senstivity of children's generation of narratives at these age levels is apparently reflected in the microstructures. This sensitivity appears at the morphological level for their written stories rather than the syntactic, phonetic, or semantic levels. Apparently these children include a wider variety of words in their written stories before revision than their oral stories. Even though a wider variety of words appear in their written stories, these words appear to be found commonly in children's oral language (see Table 8). Such an observation would tend to suggest that a distinction between oral and written vocabularies may be superfluous. It may well be that the distinction is only between receptive and expressive language. Thus, children may need to experience a writing process in order to achieve

linguistic sophistication. Moreover, such a process may be vital for moving words from their receptive vocabulary to their expressive vocabulary. In addition, oral rehearsal of their written stories in some manner may be important for using a wider variety of words in their oral language.

The almost exclusive use of and as a filler, and then, and so, and and between sentences in their oral stories suggests that these children differentiate between oral and written texts when using these devices. Such an observation tends to suggest that these items are habitual transitional oral devices that children use for coherence.

Finally, the variation of the macrostructure story elements for each student is consistent with Ice's longitudinal study. That is, students seldom used the same macrostructures for both their oral and written stories. Apparently students develop a repetoire of macro story elements from which they select when generating stories.

Implications

Along with the need for further research for significance, should be enlargement of the sample population to include average and below average students in reading achievement. Obviously, a closer examination of the relationships of oral and written language under identical conditions prior to revision and rehearsal is needed for documenting the impact of reading, storytelling, and a story writing process on children's narratives. Such information is needed so that educators can make more effective instructional decisions.

The preliminary findings of this study have several implication for educators. First, the findings suggest that students need variety in their reading and writing programs. Children need to hear and read narratives as language sources that develop understandings of language and texts other than their own.

This study also indicates that a story writing process may assist in moving words from receptive to expressive language as well as developing elaborated word knowledge. Thus,

educators must recognize the importance of providing balanced reading and writing programs that develop all the story components along with students' verbal and nonverbal story telling abilities.

Without recognizing the importance of mediation in writing and speaking along with variation in reading and listening, possibly some educators may allot time for such activites. Because of the many constraints generally found in educational settings, the probability of providing mediated writing and speaking activites may not become prevalent unless researchers and educators document the role of mediation in learning. The preferability of mediated writing and speaking experiences across discourse types along with variation in reading and writing programs is essential for students to achieve sophistication in their listening, reading, writing, and speaking.

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Appendix A
Story element categories, definitions, and examples

Story element	Definition	Example
1. Source		
A. Actual experiences	First person narration of story events that conceivably have occurred or may occur in the narrator's life.	We had a cat named Tina... One day I was at my grandma's...
B. Familiar stories	A retelling or a variation of a story that follows the story line of a story that has been heard, read, or otherwise experienced by the narrator.	There's this king in my Ernie the King book... Once there was Winnie the Pooh...
C. Novel stories	The narrator tells a story that is not based on personal experience or is not a version of a story.	Once there was a turtle who was in the army...
D. Combined sources	The narrator tells a story in which elements are combined into a text from sources which the child had heard, read, or otherwise experienced such as part of a story, a computer simulated program, etc.	Many times he had to fight off evil beasts that would follow him... Johhny, you go milk the cow. Joe, you clean the feed house...
2. Story plot		
A. Temporal sequence	A story relates character events in the order of their happening. This kind of action follows a straight line plot pattern.	He came up from the water and then he started walking to a tree and then he saw this man...

B. Mixed temporal and/or causal relations	A story relates character events in chronological order and causal connections among events are specified	So I thought Tina would... He was sad because...
C. Embedded events	The basic plot is expanded by subordinate subplots. In such stories events may or may not be in chronological order.	
3. Characters	An active participant who thinks, says, or does something in the story. That is, the participant is more than an object of action.	
A. Familiar people		
B. Familiar animals	(1) Collective nouns are counted as one character unless specified as a number.	people came to say... 1 character
C. Novel animate or inanimate things		Three bears went... 3 characters
4. Story conventions		
A. Opening		
1.Fairy tale	Use of a traditional beginning statement which is similar to folk/fairy tale openings.	Once upon a time... One time there was... Once there was...
2.Immediate action	The initial statment commences with character action and does not include traditional openings.	I went... One day the frog... One time I...
3.Setting	The time, place and/or characters are provided within one or two sentences at the beginning of the story without using traditional openings or immediate action.	Now they're in the water...
B. Endings		
1.Terminated	The action of the story is stopped without any attempt to tie the story together by plot.	And he was cold...

2.Fairy tale	The use of a traditional closing such as appears in folk/fairy tales whereby all inclusive statements are used to tie plot together.	They lived happily ever after... Everybody liked everybody...
3.Closed	A conclusion that brings the story action or plot together and leaves no questions unanswered.	
C. Tense		
1.Mixed	The combined use of past, present, and/or future tense without any recognizable pattern for inclusion in the story.	
2.Past	The consistent use of past tense except for dialogue and quotes.	He said, " I am going to the store." "So am I."
3.Episodic	The use of a specific tense for relating one episode and subsequent episode(s) are in another tense.	
4.Present/ future	The consistent use of present tense or future tense throughout the story.	
5. Clausal connections		
A. And (filler)	Followed by a pause between clauses.	
B. Pauses	Used to segment clauses.	
C. And (S+S)	Used between sentences (main clauses).	
D. And (W+W)	Used between words and/or phrases.	
E. Or (W+W)	Used between words.	
F. And then		
G. And So		
H. Subordinating conjunctions	as, where, while, unless, until, now, since, so that	
I. Causal	because, so, therefore	
J. Conditional	if	
K. Disjunctive	but, or, although	
L. Temporal	when, before, after, then	
M. Relative pronouns	that, what, which, who, whoever, whom, whomever, whose	
6. T-units	A minimal terminable unit whose total length contains one main clause with all subordinate clauses attached to it or embedded within it (Hunt, 1965).	

A. Segmentation	Based on Hunt's (1965) system of main clauses and subordinate clauses. Mazes, garbles, false starts, repetitions, and unintelligible units are omitted. A slant line indicates the beginning of each new main clause or subordinate clause. An <u>and</u> between two main clauses would always go with the second clause, beginning it just as a coordinating conjunction.	/there was a little turtle / who was walking through the woods and / people saw it a lot
1. Main clause	A clause that is grammatically capable of being considered a sentence, i.e., it can stand alone as it contains both a subject and predicate.	
2. Subordinate clause	A clause that is grammatically not a sentence and functions as a part of speech. Since it can not stand alone, it is considered a dependent clause.	
	(a) A main clause need not be complete in structure such as implicitly complete responses.	/where are you going / home
	(b) A conjoined phrase in which subject or verb deletion has occurred is segmented as one main clause.	/they tried and tried
	(c) An omitted introduction to a subordinate clause is segmented as a subordinate clause.	/he admits / the theory disturbs him
	(d) A direct quotation is segmented as part of the main clause in which it occurs.	/he said I'l eat you
	(e) Sustained dialogue is segmented as structurally complete clauses.	/the alligator goes yeah your right / maybe I should go in the army / and / you can stay up

	(f) Statements reflecting a character's thoughts are segmented as a subordinate clause.	/she wondered / what she should do /they thought /it was going to die
B. Classification	Cross segmentation of two structurally complete clauses is permitted to preserve meaning only when the combined classification would be a main clause with one or more subordinate clauses.	/he was scared death of owl / cause he got on his head
1.Simple sentences	A main clause	/ he said do you want to play
2.Compound element sentences	A main clause which contains compound words or phrases only.	/he went back home and told his mom and dad
3.Main clause and one subordinate clause		/ once I heard / a penguin lived in Ira
4.Main clause and multiple subordinate clauses		/she said/ that she would go / if she were feeling better

Table 1
Frequencies and percentages of story sources

	Oral	
	Frequency	Percent
Actual experiences	0	0
Familiar stories	3	33
Novel stories	4	45
Combined sources	2	22
Total	9	100

	Written	
	Frequency	Percent
Actual experiences	1	12
Familiar stories	3	33
Novel stories	3	33
Combined sources	2	22
Total	9	100

Table 2
Frequencies and percentages of character type

	Oral	
	Frequency	Percent
People	38	65
Animals	5	09
Other creations	15	26
Total	58	100

	Written	
	Frequency	Percent
People	26	90
Animals	1	03
Other creations	2	07
Total	29	100

Table 3
Frequencies and percentages of story plot

	Oral Frequency	Percent
Temporal sequence	2	22
Mixed temporal and/or causal	6	67
Embedded	1	11
Total	9	100

	Written Frequency	Percent
Temporal sequence	4	45
Mixed temporal and causal	2	22
Embedded	3	33
Total	9	100

Table 4
Frequencies and percentages of story conventions

	Oral Frequency	Percent
Opening		
Fairy tale	3	33
Immediate	4	45
Setting	2	22
Ending		
Termination	5	56
Fairy tale	3	33
Closing	1	11
Tense		
Mixed	2	22
Past	6	67
Episodic	1	11
Present/future	0	0

	Written	
	Frequency	Percent
Opening		
Fairy tale	3	33
Immediate	5	56
Setting	1	11
Ending		
Termination	7	78
Fairy tale	0	0
Closing	2	22
Tense		
Mixed	0	0
Past	6	67
Episodic	2	22
Present/future	1	11

Table 5
Frequencies and percentages of clausal connections

	Oral	
	Frequency	Percent
And (filler)	14	02
Pauses	183	27
And (S+S)	130	19
And (W+W)	83	12
Or (W+W)	2	0
And then	17	02
And so	8	01
Subordinating conjunctions	38	06
Causal	45	07
Conditional	5	01
Disjunctive	31	05
Temporal	39	06
Relative pronouns	83	12
Total	678	100

	Written	
	Frequency	Percent
And (filler)		
Pauses	145	54
And (S+S)	17	6
And (W+W)	28	11
or (W+W)	1	0
And then		
And so		
Subordinating conjunctions	21	8
Causal	13	5
Conditional	5	2
Disjunctive	8	3
Temporal	6	2
Relative pronouns	24	9
Total	123	100

Table 6
Frequencies and percentages of T-units

Oral		
	Frequency	Percent
Simple sentence	280	63
Compound elements	45	10
Main clause & one subordinate	101	22
Main clause & multiple subordinates	22	5
Total	448	100

Written		
	Frequency	Percent
Simple sentence	163	73
Compound elements	14	06
Main clause & one subordinate	41	18
Main clause & multiple subordinates	6	3
Total	224	100

Table 7
Frequencies of words and type token ratios

	Oral Frequency	Written Frequency
No. different word roots	1197	923
Total no. words	3064	1724
Type token ratio	.39	.54

Table 8
Total word frequencies of one written and oral text

Written							
A	4	EVE	2	MANY	1	THEM	2
ABOUT	1	EVEN	1	MY	3	THEN	2
ALL	2	EXCITED	1	NAME	1	THINGS	1
AND	4	FIGRUE	1	NOT	1	THIS	1
ANY	1	FINALLY	2	OF	6	TILL	1
ATE	1	FIRGURED	1	OPEN	2	TO	6
BAD	1	FOR	1	OR	1	TODAY	1
BE	1	FORGOT	1	OTHER	1	TOMORROW	1
BECAUSE	1	FUNNY	1	OUT	1	TONIGHT	1
BREAKFAST	1	GET	1	PRESENTS	3	TOO	1
BRUSHED	1	GOING	2	SAVE	1	TRY	1
CAME	2	GOT	7	SEEMED	1	UNUSAUL	1
CHRISTMAS	3	HAVE	1	SOMEHOW	1	UP	1
CLOTHS	1	I	18	SO	1	WAIT	1
COULD	1	IT	4	SOME	3	WAS	7
COULDN'T	2	JUST	1	TAPE	1	WHAT	2
DAY	4	LAMP	1	TEETH	1		
DID	1	LIKE	1	TELL	1		
DIFFERENT	2	LONG	1	THAT	3		
DRESSED	1	LOT	1	THATS	1		

Oral

A	2	FOUND	1	ME	1	SEE	1
AGAIN	1	FRIEND	1	MINE	1	SHE	8
ALL	1	GIVE	1	MORE	1	SHOULD	1
AND	16	GOING	1	MY	8	SO	8
ANY	2	GOT	1	NEXT	2	STUFF	1
ANYWAY	1	HAD	3	NO	1	TEACH	1
BECAUSE	2	HANDWRITING	1	OF	1	THAT	2
BED	1	HER	1	ON	5	THE	10
BOAT	3	HOME	1	ONE	1	THEN	3
BUT	1	HOMEWORK	1	COPIES	1	THERE	3
CLASS	1	I	7	OUT	1	THOUGHT	2
COULDN'T	2	IF	1	OUTLINE	1	TIME	3
DAD	1	IN	5	OVER	1	TO	3
DID	3	INBETWEEN	1	PAPER	1	UNDER	1
DO	1	IT	11	PLACE	1	US	1
DRESSER	1	LIKE	3	PROBABLY	1	WAS	5
DROPPED	1	LOOK	2	REPORT	1	WASN'T	3
FINALLY	1	LOOKED	11	RIDE	1	WATER	2
FIND	2	LOST	1	ROOM	3	WE	5
FLOATING	1	MAYBE	1	SAID	3	WELL	1
YOUR	1	YOU	1	WITH	1	WHOLE	1